

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-19

WASHINGTON POST
8 February 1984

James J. Kilpatrick **Dumb Directive**

The Reagan administration has been hurt by relatively few stupid actions over the past three years. Like every administration, it has suffered from occasional gaffes, boners, embarrassments and acts of individual misconduct, but until the White House last year pronounced National Security Decision Directive 84, we had seen little that was really stupid. This thing is downright dumb.

The purpose of Directive 84 is to prevent the disclosure of highly sensitive information in ways that would harm our national security interests. But ends are one thing, and means are another. Directive 84 would directly and immediately affect more than 100,000 civil servants. It would compel them to sign an agreement, binding for the rest of their lives, in which they pledge to submit for prepublication censorship anything they may write that deals with their experience in government or makes use of information they handled in the course of their work. James Baker, White House chief of staff, attempted a feeble defense of Directive 84 recently on "Meet the Press." He said it really applied only to top-level people in Defense, the National Security Council, the CIA and related agencies. It was "only an expansion" of rules the CIA has enforced for many years on its own employees. But Baker conceded that the directive, which has been temporarily suspended until April 15, is the subject of "rethinking."

A whole lot of rethinking needs to be thought. As a condition of original employment the requirement probably is defensible. But to impose it retroactively upon thousands of civil servants with only occasional access to sensitive information is absurd.

Taken on its face, the directive would prohibit a Jim Baker from answering questions on "Meet the Press" until the questions and his proposed answers had first been submitted for review to—to whom? To Jim Baker? Had this foolish directive been in effect during the Carter administration, former vice president Mondale would now be tongue-tied. No bad thing, perhaps. But Mondale, of course, had access to top-secret documents. Under this directive he could not make a speech about national defense without first submitting his speech to Cap Weinberger for approval. George Shultz would have to vet the further memoirs of Henry Kissinger. Jody Powell could not now be writing a syndicated column. The whole thing is loony.

In proclaiming Directive 84, President Reagan acted in uncharacteristic pique. At the time he was "up to my keister" in leaks; he was sore at the press, as every president is sore at the press. But surely it was unnecessary to propound this bristling directive with its heavy-breathing threats of "appropriate adverse consequences" for those who failed to take lie-detector tests.

If there were convincing evidence of widespread abuse, perhaps these measures could be resentfully tolerated, but no such evidence has been forthcoming. Enough said. Let us drop Directive 84 down George Orwell's memory hole, and forget it ever was proposed.

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